

A Room for Romeo Brass

UK : 2000 : dir. Shane Meadows : : 97 min
 prod: : scr: Shane Meadows & Paul Fraser : dir.ph.:
Andrew Shim; Ben Marshall
 Paddy Considine; Frank Harper; James Higgins; Bob Hoskins

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Empire – March 2000 – review:

“ **"TWENTYFOURSEVEN"** (1997) was a commercial dud, despite critical approbation, film-festival hype and a note-perfect marketing campaign. Why? Because it was in black and white? Because it didn't have Julia Roberts in it? What are we, a nation of total Philistines? ¹

Don't fret. Still in his 20s, Shane Meadows has plenty of time to turn into a bums-on-seats filmmaker – for now, let us be grateful than someone in the British film industry has ambitions above and beyond sentimentalising the working class or chasing the American dollar (or both). For those who have also seen his earlier, amateur work, **"ROMEO BRASS"** is instantly recognisable as a Shane Meadows film – for its setting (Nottingham estate), its story (simple, domestic, free of allegory) and its style (naturalistic, often hilarious but with a serious core).

It centres on two 13-year old boys, one black, one crippled, Romeo (Shim) and Knocks (Marshall), alienated from their families and drifting. They befriend a childlike man in a van, Morell (Considine, beguiling in his first professional acting role) and the film traces their doomed relationship. ²

There are, once again, shades of Ken Loach in the painful portraits of fractured family life; there is no join-the-dots abuse [*sic*] here, but Romeo's father (Frank Harper, emerging as the

new Ray Winstone) is estranged, and Knocks' dad (James Higgins) is an emotion-shy couch potato.

Co-writer Paul Fraser also choreographed the memorable dance sequences in Meadows' **"SMALLTIME"** (1996), which have to be seen to be believed. As writers, Meadows and childhood pal Paul Fraser share Mike Leigh's ear for "heard" dialogue, which, mixed with partly improvised performances, brings a reality to the proceedings that makes it both extra-warm and extra-disturbing when it goes off at the end.

Bob Hoskins, star of **"TWENTYFOURSEVEN"** and a big Meadows fan, pops up briefly as a narcoleptic tutor. Add a breezy indie soundtrack, an offputting bewigged cameo by Meadows in the chippy, and a sense of time and place to rival **"GREGORY'S GIRL"** (1980) and you've got a proper treat for lovers of real life that'll probably be another commercial disappointment for Meadows' C.V. But one day the world shall fear his name. **** ”

– Andrew Collins

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001"]

¹ *Since you ask so insistently – yes, we are a nation of total Philistines; no, a film without Julia Roberts is a positive plus; and why? – because British filmmakers have always shown a marked propensity to make films no-one particularly wants to see.*

² *Doomed because..?*

No further information currently available. Dear dear. But perhaps dysfunctional families on a Nottingham estate, set to a “breezy indie soundtrack” and with semi-improvised dialogue, is not anything the world is aching to see? The political climate, what’s more, is very different from the 1960s of British social realist cinema, so it comes as little surprise the public would flock to see a tale of male strippers, or a working-class boy ballet-dancer, but not a film like this, or “**PURELY BELTER**”, or other guaranteed commercial duds tailored for the festival circuit. For myself, I would sooner see a film that launched a coruscating attack on the values and norms of the 1990s than one which takes them as read and broods mystified over the consequences.

See subject index under **DISABLED / HANDICAPPED**, and under **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS** for more of those “doomed” intergenerational relationships. It’s striking how often film-makers choose to make the adult a simpleton or mentally handicapped man – it’s almost invariably a man – in the belief that this somehow ameliorates the sin of adult-child friendship. See for example “[DIGGING TO CHINA](#)” (97) and “[SLING BLADE](#)”, (96) but there are very many others. Remember “**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**”?